

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 000508

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S
STATE FOR EB/IFD/OMA FRANCES CHISHOLM
TREASURY FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS/AFRICA/BEN CUSHMAN
MCC FOR KEVIN SABA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [MI](#)
SUBJECT: MALAWI IMPEACHMENT RUMORS SWIRL

Classified By: CDA D. Gilmour for reasons 1.4 b and d

SUMMARY

1. (C) Long-standing rumors of an impeachment attempt in Parliament have gained some credibility recently. The President's former party is said to be ready to bring the issue to the floor soon, and the President's office is canvassing diplomatic missions for legal help. At this point, the main danger is not an impeachment attempt itself but the distraction from the parliamentary agenda. End summary.

RUMORS GAINING SOME CREDIBILITY

2. (U) For months there have been rumors of an impeachment attempt in the current session of Parliament. According to these rumors, former President Bakili Muluzi intends to persuade Malawi Congress Party (MCP) leader John Tembo to ally with Muluzi's own United Democratic Front (UDF) to table an impeachment motion against President Bingu wa Mutharika. The grounds of the motion would be irregularities in the past election, which allegedly allowed Mutharika to edge out Tembo in the Central Region.

3. (C) The rumors have acquired more credibility in recent days. The Parliament voted today to amend the National Assembly's rules to make it easier to introduce a debate on impeachment. This means a debate on the topic may well happen. That said, impeachment itself requires a 2/3 majority, which seems much less likely.

4. (C) Somewhat more alarming is that the Office of the President and Cabinet today sent a representative to the Embassy and to at least one other diplomatic mission to ask for legal assistance in case the impeachment motion should be brought and passed. The representative claimed that Muluzi has been actively seeking to bribe MPs to support impeachment.

PARLIAMENTARIANS SEEM FOCUSED ON BUDGET

5. (C) An informal meeting on 15 June between the Charge and several key parliamentarians indicated only that a serious debate on the budget is in store for next week. We saw few hints that Parliament is intent on bringing down the government or seriously weighing new elections (a no-confidence vote is not an option under the Malawian constitution). Rather, our interlocutors seemed focused on the nuts and bolts of the budget debate and the administration's development agenda, with which they are in general agreement.

COMMENT: LEGISLATIVE AGENDA THE MOST LIKELY CASUALTY

6. (C) While the President's level of concern is distressing, it still appears that impeachment is not likely. The issue may come to debate, and the UDF may offer evidence that it rigged the 2004 elections. But most parliamentarians appear to understand the economic implications of sending a signal to the world that Malawi is not politically stable. The most likely impact of the debate, if it happens at all, is that Parliament will once again fail to get through its agenda, passing the budget and nothing more. The facts that Parliament is on the cusp of claiming a role as a serious partner in government, and that this Parliament has far more gravitas than is usually the case here, argue against extreme action.
GILMOUR